DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 142 899 CG 011 632

AUTHOR Driscoll, Eileen
TITLE Intergenerational Education: A Very Human Experience.
PUB DATE 17 Oct 76
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society (29th, New York, N.Y., October 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Continuous Learning; Experience; Generation Gap; *Interaction; *Older Adults; *Oral History; Program Descriptions; Program Development; Public Schools; Recruitment; *Senior Citizens; *Youth
IDENTIFIERS *Intergenerational Education

ABSTRACT

The Intergenerational Education Program, initiated in many Massachusetts school systems, creates opportunities for youth and elders to interact with each other. The purpose of the program is to reactivate and utilize the spirit, knowledge, expertise and individual life experience of the current generation of older Americans. It shows how individuals of different generations are interdependent; how information from the elderly can be recycled effectively to other generations and how our educational system can create more positive images and attitudes about today's elders. The paper discusses the procedures for program implementation, recruitment and orientation of elders, content development, and funding resources. The Intergenerational Program, inclusive of all ages, is quite flexible so as to be adaptable to individual school systems. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED142899

INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATION: A VERY HUMAN EXPERIENCE

SISTER EILEEN DRISCOLL

DEPARTMENT OF ELDER AFFAIRS

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 02116

for

29th Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society
New York, N.Y.
October 17, 1976

CG011632

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sr. E. Driscoll

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Residence:
8 Chase Avenue
Lexington, Massachusetts
02173

CG011632

INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATION: A VERY HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Believing that education is the right of all people, at all ages, at all times, The Intergenerational Education Program, initiated in many Massachusetts school systems creates opportunities for youth and elders to interact with each other. Mature adults represent over 13% of the population of the Commonwealth. This population has survived two world wars and three depressions, many have been injured, rejected, alienated and worn by economic and social circumstances. Today, in schools young people are refusing to submit to courses that they do not consider relevant or fulfilling. Add to these statements the fact that our cities and the people therein are suffering from all sorts of fragmentation due in part to the rapid development of technology and the concommitant growth in our urban population.

This fragmentation has created great gaps between generations; had reduced family units to the smallest nuclear size and has divorced our youth from any on-going relationship with older members of our communities. The result has been emotionally disastrous for both the young and old.

In order to begin to lay the base for overcoming some aspects of generation separation, the Intergenerational Education Program was initiated as a pilot course entitled History Through Life Experience in which elders taught a course of six-week duration dealing with significant experiences of their lives. The results of this program far exceeded the expectations of those involved in setting it up whether they were workers with the elderly or members of the school personnel. Shortly afterward a day long workshop was held at Boston University to acquaint people (young and old---students and teachers) with the 'how' of organizing programs in their own communities similar to the History Through Life Experience course. The committee carried the concept one step further to explore, before the day was over, other avenues for

intergenerational developments in the fields of education, recreation and housing.

Soon a pattern developed and as inquiries came to the Department of Elder Affairs from cities and towns the Education Analyst of the Department responded to initiate proceedures for programs to be implemented on the local level. Usually two, sometimes three meetings took place with the Analyst. At the first meeting six or seven people representing both the local school department (e.g. a member of the school committee, the superintendent or representative from that office and a principal of one of the schools) and the elderly (e.g. a member of the Council on Aging, the director of the Age Center, a representative from senior housing, etc.) met with the Analyst. At the meeting time was spent discussing the broadness of the program. Every effort was made to have the concept remain open-ended for the initiation and development of programs pertinent to each individual school or area. The emphasis was to be on the participation of senior citizens with the primary concern--intergenerational communication. This can happen in many different ways, in many different situations and in many different locations. The need of recruitment of elders through the elderly contacts in the community, the newspaper, local churches and clubs was discussed. The orientation of elderly who were willing to participate as well as scheduling arrangements were also highlighted. The school personnel needed to make adjustments to the type and location of classes e.g. not scheduling a class for the next period in the classroom the elderly were ocpuying. Then there would be no upset if the seniors did not leave the room quickly enough. Types of classes in history, social studies and special topics were discussed. As the meeting closed those present were to feel the pulse of the community as regards elderly and school to see if such a program would be successful. If the response was positive a second visit by the Education Analyst would take place.

The second meeting was much larger in attendance. Members of senior organizations and interested elderly from the community who had been contacted were present to get a better understanding of the program in which they were being asked to participate. Teachers from the school system were present to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what was being asked of them. An overview of the entire program was again presented by the Education Analyst of the Department of Elder Affairs; examples of class situations ranging from k - 12 where elderly were involved were given; a video tape of a summation of the pilot program was shown; questions were answered and statements or observations discussed. Usually a good deal of enthusiasm was generated and some one of the teachers would be committed to takinging the responsibility for carrying on the program in the school. If such were the case the program was usually under way. The social studies or counseling departments were the chief source of teacher interest but this must not be taken as the rule for the teacher coordinators were and are as varied in background as the elderly who participated in the classes.

A word needs to be said about the recruitment of the elderly which can become a tedious task in some urban areas. In the city of Boston, where the program is presently in its fourth year of operation, it was necessary to employ community liaison persons who concentrated on the recruitment of senior citizens in each involved school area. Boston has twenty-nine designated schools, a high, middle, and elementary school in each of its nine school districts. There are two city-wide schools also involved in the program. These liaison persons visit senior residences, drop-in centers, clubs and homes of referrals where they recruit seniors for the local school program. As with many new programs there are relatively few recruits in the first year but it builds over the years. In smaller areas recruitment is done through local papers and personal contacts.

The Retired Senior Volunteer Program has established several Intergenerational Programs. In these the RSVP director or assistant does the recruiting or placement of volunteers in the school system. This is particularly true in the city of Newton, Massachusetts. In other instances members of the faculty, usually social strdies, have developed their own style of program and have generated interest among other teachers by presentations and sharings at regional meetings. Again in Acton-Boxborough and Sturbridge teachers have worked out just such a type program. In the smaller towns the Intergenerational Education tends to have a unifying, community-building effect and many tangential results are beginning to be documented.

Orientation sessions are necessary for all elderly who will be involved in a program for they need to have the mechanics, time and place of arrival at school, arrangement of class, method of presentation and departure from same carefully gone over to avoid confusion. Extra time on the part of the school liaison personnel should be given to discuss content and to give the older person a sense of security and confidence. We have found, in instances where the elders may have had relatively little schooling it was well to have two special orientation sessions with them. The first session dealt with a comparasion between experiential and book learning. Definitions and limitations of each type were listed; a great deal of discussion took place and it was the conclusion of the class that whereas each type of learning had certain strengths and weaknesses they were both necessary to total knowledge. It was the class's understanding that experiential learning was a crucial complement to book learning and that both elements were equally valid.

A second session dealt with speaking from a "Frame of Reference" for there were many expressed fears that "Maybe I won't tell it right", This exercise

was designed to show that there are often (and are usually) many equally valid ways to view a single event. As this all applied to the elders it demonstrated there were as many valid and "correct" interpretations of history and life as there are people. This idea was gotten across by showing a list of animals and asking simply to group them. No further directions were given. Each person gave their grouping and reason for it. It was then pointed out that there are no right or wrong ways to group with such general direction and there are no right or wrong ways to feel about a certain historical event as you recall and share it. This exercise succeeded in giving the final confidence needed to prepare the outline of the talks the elders were to give.

A third and final orientation session was held where staff at the age center helped the senior citizen prepare the information to be shared with the class. Later, in the actual presentations, most found they needed little or no reference to these papers but that they did serve as "Linus blankets" so to speak. I might add that this elaborate preparation is not needed where men and women from the professions are volunteers. The very nature of their work in life has brought them before audiences many times.

Within the school system a teacher was chosen as school liaison with the same kind of remuneration and time schedule as the teachers who were faculty advisors for other extracurricular activities. Arrangements were made for meeting the elderly and conducting them to the respective classroom. Posters and other advance notice was conducted within the school.

It is important to note that school committees have endorsed the recommendations offered by proponents of the program and authorized their implementation in all cases where we have had the most success. The press in each area was well utilized with public announcements and pictures heralding each project. These usually bring immediate and very positive response. The concept of utilizing the valuable life experiences of senior citizens in order

to enrich the learning experiences of the students proved to have a wide appeal. Boston and other newspapers, both daily and weekly, as well as television and radio stations made further inquiries and indicated their support by their favorable publicity. As the program began to develop and as information concerning it began to reach the community, many other school systems and teachers began to inquire of modifications in the program. Many variations from day programs to week long events and mini-courses were begun. Frequent requests for lectures on the Aging Process and Image of Aging were received and responded to by the Department of Elder Affairs' Education Analyst.

Strong ties of cooperation have been established with R.S.V.P. (Retired Senior Volunteer Project) which registers all our seniors if there is a Project in the given school area. Registration in the R.S.V.P. Program has the advantage of providing the volunteers with insurance coverage and some compensation for travel (carfare) and lunch.

Each school department where programs have been developed is enthusiastic about the potentialities of the Intergenerational Project. Let me quote from a past year progress report of the Boston Public Schools--"During a school year it is our aim to have each school conducting a program plan and place into operation an intergenerational project by early Spring. Each project was to be educationally valuable, intergenerational in character and clearly relevant to the general theme "Active Learning With Living Historians". Each school was encouraged to develop a project that would be unique and related to its own needs and resources. During the past school year in addition to the particular programs for each school, a series of "umbrella" programs related to the Bicentennial Celebration has also been arranged."

Superintendents, the Administrative Staff, Principals and Teachers have offered many imaginative and valuable suggestions for the utilization of senior citizens in the enrichment of the school experience. It might be helpful to include a selection of some of these suggestions. The following are ways senior citizens can be involved in the schools:

1. History and Civics Classes
   Sharing life experiences
   Resource person for discussion groups
   Political action - senior citizens and students attend hearings - adults guide students in the art of lobbying - follow up discussion - letter writing and other activities

2. Language and Art Classes
   Read and share in discussion of assigned books. Students interview senior citizens using tape recorders and then edit interviews for the school library.
   Seniors leading conversational round tables in the various foreign languages taught in the school. This can be done in the caf at lunch one day a week for example.

3. Home Economics
   Senior citizens can be resource people to share their special cooking and/or sewing skills
   Preparing various ethnic dishes and giving an explination of the tradition behind them

4. Shop Classes
   Seniors as aides in the classroom to give students more individual help.
   Senior citizens can be resource people to share special skills in carpentry, metal, cabinit making, auto mechanics, etc.

5. Special Interest Groups
   Senior citizens with special expertise in photography, ship building, sailing, sculpturing, painting, music, etc. might be invited to lead small groups to help them learn about these interests and begin to pursue one as a hobby.

6. Remedial Possibilities
   Senior citizens might work on a one-to-one basis with a student that needs extra help in a basic subject - reading or mathematics. Listen to the student read - discuss with student Be supportive aides under the Chapter 766 learning disiabilities program

7. Science and health Classes
   Students as they learn about health and nutrition can share their knowledge with senior citizens. Discover the good and poor eating habits of each group. Discuss budgeting.

In conclusion a word needs to be said about the financing of these programs. Initially there is very little expense and in some cases none at all. The school budget absorbes the cost of the teacher who is school liaison. The elderly are happy to have the need to be needed and contribute their services. We have already mentioned the R.S.V.P. program which will insure them and give travel and lunch money. This arrangement has been most used for it reimburses the elder person for any incurred expense. Only in the large cities where community liaison persons are needed and a coordinator etc. is it necessary to look for funds. The most success in soliciting these monies has come from local funding of private charities and from foundations. In each case the success of the already existing program and the desire for its maintainence and growth were the motivating factors in obtaining funds.

Now you have the story. We all know new ventures are frightening but we also know they are worth the effort. With numerous attempts to build a new role for elders in our community - a role which says YOU ARE IMPORTANT, YOUR EXPERIENCES GIVE NEW MEANING TO THE LIVES OF ALL IN OUR COMMUNITY, we can begin to integrate our common needs for belonging and create community with concern and compassion. These values were predominant during the lives of our elders and if we reach back with them and return them to our lives, we can overcome the fractured existence that so many suffer.

****

29th Annual Meeting of the Gerontological Society
New York, N.Y.
October 17, 1976